

U.S. Coast Guard History Program

Comanche, 1959

WMEC-202; ex-USS *Wampanoag* (ATA-202)



A tribe of Native American Indians that ranged over the western plains from Wyoming to Texas. They were forced to settle on lands in Oklahoma.

Builder: Gulfport Boiler & Welding Works, Port Arthur, Texas

Length: 143'

Beam: 33' 10"

Draft: 13' 3"

Displacement: 754 tons

Cost: \$

Commissioned: 6 December 1944 (USN); 25 February 1959 (USCG)

Decommissioned: 30 January 1980

Disposition: Returned to the USN for disposition. She then saw service as a private tug and as of 2007 was serving as a museum ship in Tacoma, Washington.

Machinery: 2 electric motors driven by 2 generators driven by 2 General Electric GM 12-228A diesel engines; 750 SHP each

Performance & Endurance:

Max: 13.5 knots

Cruising: 8.5 knots; 12,000-mile range

Complement: 47

Armament: 1 x 20mm/80 (1963);
2 x .50 caliber; 2 x 40mm (1970)

Electronics: AN/SPS-23 radar

History:

Comanche was the former Navy *Sotoyomo*-class auxiliary ocean tug USS *Wampanoag* (ATA-202). She was laid down on 24 August 1944 at Port Arthur, Texas, by the Gulfport Boiler & Welding Works. She was launched on 10 October 1944 and commissioned on 8 December 1944.

The auxiliary ocean tug completed her shakedown training during the latter half of December 1944 and proceeded via the Panama Canal to the Pacific. On 12 January 1945, she reported for duty with the Pacific Fleet and, by late April, had joined Service Squadron (ServRon) 10 in support of the Okinawa campaign. Late in May, she moved to Okinawa itself for a brief tour of duty and returned to her base at Ulithi in mid-June. It is reasonable to assume that her round-trip voyage to the Ryukyus was for the purpose of towing battle-damaged ships back to Ulithi for repair. She continued her duty with ServRon 10 through the end of the war, returned to the United States in September, and began nine months of duty in the 11th Naval District at San Diego. She was reassigned to the Atlantic Reserve Fleet's Texas Group in March 1946 and actually reported to Orange, Texas, in July. On 27 February 1947, the tug was placed out of service there and berthed with the Texas Group, Atlantic Reserve Fleet. *ATA-202* was named *Wampanoag* on 16 July 1948.

Wampanoag remained in reserve until 25 February 1959 at which time she was loaned to the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard placed her in commission as the cutter *Comanche* on that date although it was not until a little over 10 years later, on 1 June 1969, that the Navy permanently transferred her to the Coast Guard, at which time her name was struck from the Navy list.

She was first home-ported at Morro Bay, California, where she was assigned to law enforcement and search and rescue patrols as well as the re-supply of remote light stations and lightships. In 1961 she transferred to Sausalito, California. From 1962 to 1967 she was stationed at San Francisco, California.

On the morning of 23 March 1963, the 523-foot converted tanker SS *Cottonwood Creek* radioed "Disabled and fire in engine room off Mile Rock. Request Coast Guard assistance" The *Comanche* responded and towed the disabled vessel to a safe anchorage. The *Comanche*,

along with other Coast Guard units, responded to a distress call from the Japanese freighter *Kokoku Maru* on 4 June 1963 after the freighter collided with another vessel off the Farallon Islands. The *Comanche* reported that the *Kokoku Maru* was struck on the starboard side just aft of the bridge, leaving approximately a 30-foot wide by 40-foot high gash in the side of the freighter. The engine room, boiler room and No. 3 hold flooded. One seaman was killed and the other 43 crewmen abandoned their ship and were rescued by the *Comanche*. Commercial tugs towed the freighter to Richmond harbor. On 4 August 1965 she stood by the disabled fishing vessel *Mark Christopher* near Half Moon Bay, California, while awaiting a tug. On 26 September 1966 she helped fight a fire on a barge in San Francisco harbor.

From 1967 to 1969 she stationed at Corpus Christi, Texas. On 7 January 1968 she towed the disabled fishing vessel *Mermaid* from 70 miles southeast of Port Aransas, Texas, to that port. On 9 October 1968 she rescued three from the motor vessel *Elsie* 15 miles south-southeast. She returned to the west coast and was stationed at Eureka, California in 1969 where she remained based out of for the remainder of her Coast Guard career. In 1978 she issued "the first notice of violation" ever given to a foreign fishing vessel in the California, Oregon, and Washington trawl fisheries.>

She was decommissioned on 30 January 1980 and her crew cross-decked to the CGC *Clover*.

Wampanoag (ATA-202) was awarded one battle star during World War II.

Images:



No official caption, photo dated 13 April 1963.



Official caption reads: "General View of Vessel Stbd. Side Forward
USCGC COMANCHE (WATA-202); photo dated 19 June 1959.



Official caption reads: "BURNING VESSEL RETURNED TO PORT: The Coast Guard Cutter COMANCHE tows the disabled and burning tanker SS COTTONWOOD CREEK under the Golden Gate Bridge and back into San Francisco. The ship's master radioed the Coast Guard for help at 9:37 this morning saying he was disabled near Mile Rock Light Station and had a fire in the engine room. The Coast Guard responded with helicopters, patrol boats and the COMANCHE, and the fire was reported under control before noon. The Cutter COMANCHE

towed the COTTONWOOD CREEK to anchorage 7 in San Francisco Bay (near Treasure Island). Cause of the fire is not yet known but the Coast Guard is conducting an investigation."; photo dated 23 March 1962.



No official caption; photo dated April, 1978.
Photo No. 12-04187813-6.

Sources:

Cutter History File. USCG Historian's Office, USCG HQ, Washington, D.C.

Dictionary of American Navy Fighting Ships. Washington, DC: USGPO.

Robert Scheina. *U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft, 1946-1990.* Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990.

